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Christian Peace

Four Hundred Years of Mennonite Principles and Practice

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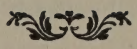
Four Hundred Years of Mennonite Peace Principles and Practice

One of a Series of Peace Pamphlets Issued by the Peace Committee of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.
1938



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Among the soundly Biblical Anabaptists of the sixteenth century and their spiritual successors, the Mennonites, non-resistance and opposition to the use of force in the settling of disputes, either private or national, was a cardinal religious principle from the beginning. This practice was based on both good Scripture and sound psychology: good Scripture, for undoubtedly Jesus was a thorough-going non-resistant; sound psychology, because there is no social law more certain than the one expressed by the common saying, "Like Begets Like." Hatred breeds hatred, and only good will engenders good will in return. To the early Mennonites human life was sacred, too sacred to be casually snuffed out like a dimly lit candle by a chance puff of wind, for any cause whatsoever—whether as a result of human passion in a private quarrel, collectively by force of arms, or even by judicial process. Mennonites sometimes spoke of themselves as revengeless Christians.

War to these followers of the Prince of Peace was a sin; and like all sin to be completely shunned. Of course every normal person hates war; but to the Mennonites repudiation of war and refusal to take part in it became a religious dogma as sacred and as binding on the individual conscience as any other fundamental religious belief. Thou shalt not kill was a divine command that knew no exceptions.

Non-participation in war, therefore, became a universal Mennonite doctrine and practice with but few exceptions for fully three hundred years. This doctrine found full expression in the works of every Mennonite

writer during this period, in every accepted confession of faith of the church, and in all the public debates held between Mennonite leaders and their theological opponents. A few citations from these sources must suffice here as evidence of this universal testimony against the practice of war.

Conrad Grebel, one of the earliest of the Swiss Anabaptists, in a letter written in 1524 to the leader of the Peasants Revolt, in south Germany, discouraging the use of force in bringing about better economic conditions for the peasants, says,

> "The Gospel and those who accept it should not be protected with the sword, neither should they thus protect themselves. True believing Christians are as sheep for the slaughter in the midst of wolves. They must be baptized in anxiety and trouble, tribulation, persecution, suffering and death. They must be tried in fire and must reach the fatherland of eternal rest, not by slaying bodily enemies, but by overcoming spiritual foes. They use neither the worldly sword nor engage in war, since among them taking human life has ended entirely, for we are no longer under the old covenant."

Menno Simon on War

Menno Simon was outspoken in his denunciation of war. Among numerous references found in his writings is this one:

> "The regenerated do not go to war nor fight. They are the children of peace who have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and know no war. They give to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. Their sword is the sword of the Spirit which they wield with a good conscience through the Holy Spirit.

Since we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, how can we then fight our enemies with the sword? Does not Peter say 'for even hereunto were ye called, because Christ suffered also for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps; who reviled not again; when he suffered he retaliated not, but committed himself to Him who judgeth the righteous.'

My dear reader, if the poor, ignorant world with an honest heart accepted this our despised doctrine which is not of us but of Christ, and faithfully obeyed it, they might well change their deadly swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, level their gates and walls, dismiss their executioners and henchmen. For all who accept our doctrine in its power will by God's grace have no ill will against anyone upon earth, and not even against their most bitter enemies, much less wrong and harm them by deeds and action.

O man! man! look upon the irrational beasts and learn wisdom. The roaring lion, the treacherous bear, the gluttonous wolf, all these live in peace among their kind. But you poor, helpless creatures, created in God's image and called rational beings, are born without claws and horns and weak by nature, speechless and without strength, yea neither able to walk nor stand, but entirely dependent upon material care to teach you that you should be men of peace and not of strife.

Peter was commanded to put up the sword into the sheath. All Christians are bidden to love their enemies, do good to those who do them evil, and pray for those who persecute and oppress them; to give the cloak also to those who sue them at law for the coat; if they are stricken on the right cheek to turn the other also. Say beloved, how can a Chris-

tian according to the Scriptures consistently retaliate, rebel, make war, commit murder, slay, torture, steal and rob and burn cities and devastate the land?"

Mennonite Confessions of Faith on Non-Resistance

In the numerous debates which Mennonite leaders held throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries with their theological opponents of the state churches, opposition to war was nearly always one of the important questions on the agenda. In a disputation carried on between Mennonite and Reformed leaders in Emden in 1578, the Mennonite spokesman, replying to the assertion that those within the church might use the sword, said—

"We say that during the time when the enemy is near or before the gates of the city, we would not do guard duty with weapons, nor would we send another in our place. But so long as there is no occasion to fight an enemy we are willing to pay another to render such service."

Every early Mennonite confession of faith also stood unequivocably for the non-resistant doctrine. The two most widely known and generally accepted of these statements among the American Mennonites of even today are the Dordrecht Confession of 1632, in general use among the Old Mennonites and other more or less conservative groups; and the Cornelis Ris articles, first accepted by several Dutch groups in 1766, later in general circulation among the Mennonites of Prussia, and in 1902 translated and ordered published in English by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.

The Dordrecht Confession under the heading "Defense by Force" says—

"Regarding revenge, whereby we resist our enemies with the sword, we believe and confess that the Lord Jesus Christ has forbidden his disciples and follow-

ers all revenge and resistance, and has thereby commanded them not to return 'evil for evil, nor railing for railing'; but to 'put up the sword into the sheath,' or as the prophets foretold 'beat them into plowshares'.

". . . . . according to the example, life and doctrine of Christ, we are not to do wrong, or cause offense or vexation to anyone; but to seek the welfare and salvation of all men; also if necessary to flee for the Lord's sake from one city or country to another, and suffer 'spoiling of our goods' rather than give occasion of offense to anyone: and if we are struck on our right cheek, rather to turn the other also, 'than revenge ourselves, or return the blow' '. . . . and that we are, besides this also to pray for our enemies, comfort and feed them, when they are hungry or thirsty, and thus by well doing convince them and overcome the evil with good.' "

The Cornelis Ris statement is even more explicit in its defense of this doctrine. Under the caption "Revenge and War," article XXIX reads as follows—

"It is as we think, self-evident that the use of deadly weapons and the carrying on of warfare to the destruction of our enemies—and even of innocent ones who have not wronged us but upon whom in war often falls the burden of misery and sorrow—is entirely unseemly for the true follower of Jesus and therefore not allowed.—For we are persuaded that war, as we know it, can not possibly be carried on without manifestly violating the fundamental principles of Christ's kingdom, and without nurturing vice and practices contrary to those principles, whereby there is very often manifested the likeness of beasts and of devils, rather than of the followers of the Lamb of God, and those that show forth His excellencies.

> "We therefore hold that it is our duty carefully to abstain from the use of all warlike weapons and from the above mentioned hostile resistance; that it is allowed to flee from the evil as much as is in our power, to adopt such measures against an enemy that without working to his destruction we may prevent and bring to naught his hostile purposes, and by means of defensive reasoning and good words, and manifold kindnesses to bring him to reflect and be at peace."

These various statements leave no doubt as to the attitude of the early Mennonites on the question of war. Renunciation was not merely a pious wish among them: non-participation was as vital a part of their religious faith as any other belief or practise, and its violation as gross a sin, subject to the same punishment. In a conference of Waterland Mennonites held in Emden in 1568 it was decreed that if a brother took part in military drill with a view to service

> "he shall desist from it, confess to sorrow for the offense, and ask the forgiveness of God and the church before he may be recognized as in peace with the church."

As late as 1803 a group of some twenty congregations of south Germany, meeting at Ibersheim in conference, drew up a set of resolutions threatening all the young men who voluntarily joined Napoleon's armies of that period with expulsion from the church.

Inconsistent Practices

While Mennonites of all shades of thought were quite unanimous in their opposition to direct participation in warfare, there was some difference of opinion occasionally as to how far they might consistently go indirectly. Mennonitism, insisting as it does upon the rights of the individual conscience in all religious thinking, and prac-

tising an extremely democratic type of government, has always been a fruitful field for the growth of individualism. There has always been a right and left wing among the Mennonites. A good example of logical consistency was that of certain Dutch Mennonites who in the early seventeenth century forbade their brethren who were engaged in foreign commerce to arm their merchant vessels for protection against the pirates who still infested the open seas of that period. This regulation which applied to those who travelled on such ships as well as to the owners or part owners, forced a number of Mennonite merchants to withdraw from membership in the East India Company, whose ships were all heavily armed during this period. Perhaps the most consistent of all the Mennonites were the followers of Jacob Hutter, if indeed these may be spoken of as Mennonites, who forbade their cutlers in their community workshops to make weapons of warfare; only knives and cutlery that could be used for peace purposes. Nor did they permit the manufacture of gun-powder.

> "Since Christians", they said, "shall beat up or lay down their swords, they can much less manufacture them, for they can be used only to harm, wound and destroy men, but Christ came not to destroy. Since they dare not practise vengeance they can not either manufacture the instruments through which violence may be exercised, lest they also share their sin. Therefore, we do not make swords, spears, guns nor other weapons of this nature. But what is daily made use of by man such as knives. axes, hoes and such like, these we may make. But if some one should suggest that with such implements also one may harm another, we reply that they are not made for the purpose of destruction, and therefore we can consistently make them. If some one uses them to anothers harm that is not our responsibility."

Less consistent were those Dutch Mennonites who in the latter part of the sixteenth century bought their first grant of religious toleration from William of Orange with some eleven thousand gulden, collected from the various churches throughout Holland, at a time when the Stadthalter was in dire need of funds for carrying on his war of independence against the Spanish king Philip. Perhaps equally as illogical were the Prussian Mennonites who accepted Frederick the Great's offer of military exemption and religious toleration in return for an annual grant from the combined churches of a lump sum of five thousand thaler to be used for the support of a military training school at Culm. Coming nearer home, it is a debatable question whether the American Mennonites during the Civil war were justified, in the light of their non-resistant principles, in buying their freedom by the payment of three hundred dollars which might be used to find substitutes to take their place in the army.

Non-Resistance Not a Cause of Persecution

Contrary to general opinion, refusal to serve in the army was not usually a prime cause of Mennonite persecution. Before the Napoleonic wars, armies were generally filled with volunteers. Conscription was seldom necessary. Soldiering was a profession, a way of making a living. Men did not fight for a worthy cause as a rule, but for pay, or excitement and above all for the prospect of plunder. Armies were not large, and fighting not particularly hazardous, nor burdensome. The average citizen was not forced into the armies. Mennonites, as well as others, therefore, who refused military service because of conscientious opposition did not become especially conspicuous as a result of their refusal to participate in warfare. There were a few exceptions to be sure. The rulers of the Swiss cantons received the major portion of their revenues from the sale of mercenary soldiers to the warring powers of Europe. Many of the wars of the

eighteenth century were fought with Swiss soldiers on every side; for fighting men were sold to the highest bidder in the open market. Universal military service therefore, was a common practice in the Swiss cantons; and men refusing to serve in the army for any reason whatsoever were not profitable subjects to their rulers. Objection to this practise of furnishing the cannon fodder for wars of foreign potentates was one of the chief objectives of the Zwinglian reform in the early days of the Swiss Reformation. Mennonites, therefore, because they refused to be sold into army service were driven out of their fatherland during the early part of the eighteenth century.

With this conspicuous exception, however, Mennonites found little difficulty in securing recognition of their anti-war principles. Being thrifty farmers, and industrious artisans, they were often invited to settle on unprofitable and unimproved public lands by thrifty landlords and farsighted rulers, who were willing to waive religious orthodoxy in return for economic gain. These special privileges were much more easily obtained in the days of autocratic kings and potentates who were not obliged to bow to public opinion than in these days of democratic rule when the majority is usually not inclined to grant special privileges to the minority.

When, during the middle of the sixteenth century, certain Dutch Mennonites, experts in the building of dikes and draining of lowlands, were undergoing severe persecution at the hands of their Spanish oppressors, the kings and local noblemen of Poland were glad to promise these Dutch refugees religious freedom, including military exemption, if they would settle and improve the hitherto unfruitful and uninhabited swamp lands along the Vistula delta. Several centuries later, after this part of Poland had been incorporated into Prussia, and when, due to Mennonite population growth, jealous na-

tive farmers and business men in the neighboring regions, envious of the greater prosperity of the industrious Mennonites and of their special privileges, induced Frederick the Great and his successors to curtail their promised privileges, the Prussian Mennonites in turn were again offered liberal religious and political privileges including miltary exemption, by the Empress of Russia, Catherine the Great, as an inducement to colonize her recently won Turkish crown lands in south Russia.

European Mennonites Lose Nonresistant Faith

But by the close of the eighteenth century the Mennonites themselves in various parts of Europe were beginning to show signs of lukewarmness in their long struggle in behalf of their peace principles. The continuous attack of the state churches upon Mennonite nonconformity, denial by governments of many of the usual civil privileges, the growing nationalism engulfing Europe as a result of the Napoleonic wars, a hostile public opinion, the gradual infiltration into the churches of a non-Mennonite element through intermarriage with life partners who had not been brought up in the traditional peace principles of the Mennonites, disregard for the old spiritual virtues because of growing economic prosperity, the migration of most of the faithful to America and Russia—all these and other causes are given by the writers of the time as the reasons for the loss of the non-resistant faith among the Mennonites of western Europe by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The Dutch Mennonites whose numbers had dwindled from one hundred and sixty thousand in 1700, to twenty-seven thousand in 1809, were the first to forsake the old traditions. In the Napoleonic wars the Dutch Mennonites were forced into the war, and after that they no longer protested against war service. In 1853 the remnant of the peace minded group from the church at Balk migrated to Indiana. In recent years, however, the peace

sentiment has again been revived among a small group of Dutch Mennonites as a result of Quaker influence from England. A peace society with a small but growing membership among the younger ministers and members is gaining strength and influence. Just recently also after the late World Mennonite Congress at Amsterdam a group from this Dutch society, together with one German, and a number of the American delegates to the World Congress, met at Friedesheim, Holland and organized an International Mennonite Peace Society, with Dr. J. Termeulen, librarian of the Hague Court Library, as Secretary.

The few scattered churches in northwestern Germany have followed their Dutch brethren in the matter of peace as well as in most other questions of doctrine and practise.

In south Germany, and in France and Switzerland, much the same results have followed, though a little more slowly. Although a number of church leaders, as already seen, met at Ibersheim, and forbade voluntary joining of the army, yet many of the young men were forced into service, which paved the way later for voluntary service. Little church action seemingly was taken against these. Several of the states in which Mennonites were found permitted substitute service of which the young men for a time took advantage. After the Napoleonic era such Mennonites as still had a tender conscience on the question of war, migrated to America, leaving behind the more liberal minded, who in the course of time gradually accommodated themselves to the general practices of the country.

In Prussia the struggle was continued a little longer. In 1868 as a result of frequent petitioning on the part of the Vistula Delta elders, especially those from the country churches, to the Berlin government, the North German Confederation, issued what was known as a Cab-

inet Order granting Mennonites alternative non-combatant instead of regular service. But these elders fought a losing struggle. They were not supported by their brethren from western Germany nor much by the city churches, such few as there were at that time; and the young men, too, many of them, were strangely not as anxious as their elders to uphold the old traditions. In the war of 1870 many young Mennonites all over Germany as well as in France took full military service. A small group of those most interested in maintaining their peace principles, for the most part from the congregation at Heubuden, migrated to our West at the time of the great Russian trek to America. By 1914 nonresistance in Germany as well as in France was a dead letter, and few Mennonites took advantage even of the noncombatant clause which was still their privilege.

In Russia the Mennonites had remained more or less loyal to their early peace principles up to the time of the World War. When in the early seventies of the past century the promises of exemption made by Catherine the Great were revoked, and alternative noncombatant service was prescribed, about one-third of the whole Mennonite population migrated to America. Those who were left took up forestry service instead of regular military service in times of peace, which was not connected with the army organization. In the recent war few young men joined the regular forces, but about five thousand entered the forestry service, and another five thousand organized and supported an independent Hospital and Sanitary unit of their own which the government officials pronounced one of the finest units in the whole service. For a short time after the war, during the raids of the bandit Machno, a number of the young men throughout the Mennonite settlements organized what they called the "Selbstschutz", and for a time forgot their nonresistance. It is now the opinion among many of the Russian Mennonites that this was a tactical blunder

as well as a denial of the faith of their fathers; for it is generally agreed they suffered more from the bandits than they would have had they not used force against them. What the attitude of the disorganized and oppressed church is now under the rule of the Bolshevists, and what it will be no one can tell, but it is entirely within the realm of possibility that under the stress of the times, and the determined effort of the communists to stamp out all religious conviction, not only the nonresistant principle but the whole Mennonite faith may be exterminated in the land where for a full century and a half Mennonites enjoyed a degree of economic prosperity and religious and civil liberty unparalleled in all Mennonite history.

American Mennonites Keep the Faith

It remains for the American Mennonites to uphold the old traditions and principles. The Mennonites of America have been a selected people—selected on the basis of their opposition to war. From Switzerland, Germany, France, Russia and even from Holland those Mennonites throughout history who had a tender conscience on the war question came to America, thus forming a special group especially sensitive on the peace doctrine. America, too, has alway been a land of peace with few long wars. The faith of the nonresistants with a few exceptions was seldom tested. Until the recent World War there was little conscription, and no compulsory military drill in times of peace. And so it was not so difficult as it was for their European brethren to retain their peace testimony.

Mennonite and Dunkard Petition of 1775

This does not mean of course that they were relieved from all anxiety for their principles. They still needed to be constantly on guard against the dangers that might either threaten or undermine their religious liberty. Soon after they came to Pennsylvania, fearful that the

Indian wars on the frontier might involve their own settlements, and desirous of a moral stimulant that might keep their young people true to the faith of the fathers, they ordered the reprint at Ephrata in 1748 of their big Martyr book, one of the largest publication efforts of the entire colonial period. In the early stages of the Revolutionary war, which in a way was also somewhat of a civil war, the colonists were often sharply divided in their allegiance into Patriots and Tories. The Mennonites, being opposed to all rebellion against constituted authority, and nonresistant, were inclined to be neutral in the conflict, with a slight leaning perhaps to the Tory side. Fearing that their refusal to follow the advice of the Pennsylvania Assembly to join the "Associators", the Mennonites, together with the Dunkards, who shared their peace principles, addressed a combined petition to the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1775, stating their peace doctrines and their attitude toward war.

Referring in this petition to the peace principles upon which Pennsylvania was founded, they say—

> "Hoping that the worthy Body of Assembly and all in high and low office may be moved by the same spirit of Grace which animated the first Founder of this Province our late Proprietor William Penn to grant Liberty of Conscience to all its inhabitants that they may in the great and memorable Day of Judgment be put on the right hand of that just Judge, who judgeth without Respect of Person, and hear of him the blessed words, Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, ... among which number we by his Grace hope to be ranked; and every Lenity and Favor shown to such tender Conscience, although weak Followers of of this our blessed Saviour will not be forgotten by him in that great Day."

In reply to the suggestion made by the Assembly that all those having conscientious scruples against bearing

arms should be especially liberal in lending help to such as may be in distress because of the war, the petition adds that this request

> "We receive with Cheerfulness . . . it being our Principle to feed the Hungry and give the Thirsty Drink. We have dedicated ourselves to serve all Men in everything that can be helpful to the Preservation of Men's Lives, but we find no Freedom in giving or doing, or assisting in anything by which Men's Lives are destroyed or hurt. — We beg the patience of all who believe we err on this Point. We are always ready according to Christ's command to Peter to pay the Tribute that we offend no man, and so we are willing to pay Taxes, and so render unto Caesar those things that are Caesar's and to God those Things that are God's."

Conscription Act of 1917

This attitude toward war remained the official position of the American Mennonites of all branches throughout the following century up to the present time —refusal to bear arms, eager to do their full share in relieving the distress of war sufferers, and willingness to pay taxes. The wars of 1812, 1848 and 1898, fought entirely with volunteers, called for no action on the part of the Mennonites. In the Civil War conscription was resorted to in the North only near the close, in which provision was made for Mennonite scruples. In the South, non-resistants, after the repeal of the exemption clause, were placed under certain restraints for a while. It was not until the recent World War that the religious convictions of the non-resistants were really tested out. This struggle was to be conducted on such a large scale, and demanded such a complete mobilization of the nation's man power and resources, that every single individual was called upon to do his full share in carrying the common burden; and if he didn't enter heartedly

into the various Liberty Bond drives and Y M C A campaigns he was immediately singled out as a slacker, ridiculed, and often abused by his neighbors and fellow citizens. The pressure was strong and it took real courage to withstand it; far more than to march with the crowd.

When it became evident soon after war was declared that a conscription act was likely to pass, all the peace churches, and every wing of the Mennonite church deluged both Congress and the President with petitions asking that the traditional regard for religious convictions be observed in the coming act. Influenced partly by these petitions no doubt, but more perhaps by the precedents of former Congresses, influence of prominent Quakers, the example perhaps of the English Conscription law, Congress finally passed a law exempting from active service religious objectors to war under certain conditions.

American Government Sympathetic Toward Mennonites

While the American Mennonites on the one hand held tenaciously to their peace doctrines, the American government on the other was always most considerate of their religious scruples, as is evidenced by the liberal legislation passed in their behalf throughout their whole American period of history.

The only Colonies in which Mennonites were found at the time of the Revolutionary war were Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. In each of these, Mennonites were exempted from militia musters, which seemed to be generally provided for by the local county authorities, upon the payment of a sum of money, usually called a fine. In Virginia, however, in 1777, where provisions were made for conscription, Mennonites in case they were drafted for service were to be discharged upon furnishing a substitute, who was to be paid by a levy upon the entire church membership.

After the war, in 1790, the constitution of the new state of Pennsylvania declared that "those who conscientiously scruple to bear arms shall not be compelled to bear arms, but shall pay an equivalent." A law of Maryland, in 1793, provides that "Quakers, Mennonites, and Tunkers and all others who are conscientious shall pay a sum of three dollars annually." The Virginia militia code in 1860, provided that all privates refusing to attend military musters must pay a fine of seventy-five cents. Of course, enforcement of militia codes in the states in time of peace was not as rigid as the military acts of the National government in times of war.

In the Civil War both North and South were finally forced to resort to conscription. The Federal Act of February 24, 1864, exempted those having conscientious scruples, permitting them to accept hospital service when drafted, or pay three hundred dollars exemption money. No person, however, was entitled to the benefits of this cause unless his declaration of conscientious scruples was "supported by satisfactory evidence that his deportment has been uniformly consistent with such declaration." Practically all the northern Mennonites took advantage of this provision; and after proving that their daily conduct squared up with their conscientious declarations, paid three hundred dollars, thus securing their freedom. Such few stragglers as may have taken regular service voluntarily were usually disciplined by their respective congregations.

In the South, Virginia resorted to universal service almost from the beginning, and no exceptions were made at first for religious scruples. A number of Mennonite young men from Rockingham county were called into the army in 1861. These refused to fight. Some of them, a group of some seventy in number, attempting to escape into the North, were apprehended, thrown into the famous Libby prison for a time, given a trial, but because of their religious convictions again set free. Early in 1862

the state passed a law exempting members of a church forbidding the bearing of arms, upon payment of five hundred dollars, however, and a further sum of two percent of the assessed valuation of all taxable property. In case of refusal to comply with this provision the draftee must accept some sort of noncombatant service in the army.

This law, however, was superseded the same year by the national conscription act of the Confederacy which also provided for the exemption of the "Society of Friends, Association of Dunkards, Nazarenes and Mennonites" upon the payment of five hundred dollars. This law, too, was repealed in 1864. The only escape from military service now for the Virginia Mennonites was escape into Pennsylvania or the mountains of West Virginia, which many of them accomplished.

Some ten years later, in the middle seventies, when some ten thousand Mennonites from Russia located on our western prairies, forced from their native land because they refused to comply with a recently enacted universal military service law, these Russians, sensitive as they were regarding their peace principles, evidently felt, never the less, that the policy adopted by the North toward the Mennonites exempting them in times of war upon a money payment, assured an ample guarantee that in the future, too, no one would be forced to do what his conscience forbade. But to make assurance doubly sure, many of the immigrants desired some sort of legal guarantee of their freedom from military service. A small committee of Hutterites, had a meeting with President Grant, but of course could receive no assurance from him except his opinion that future wars would all be fought by volunteers, and it would not be likely that any one would be forced into service contrary to his will.

A number of western states, however, engaged in a keen rivalry to secure industrious settlers on their vacant lands, and urged by the railroad companies and eager

land departments, were more willing to make definite promises. In fact many of the states of the Union already had in one form or another in their constitutions or on their statute books some sort of recognition of conscientious scruples in matters pertaining to war service.

Kansas was the first of the several western states to pass additional legislation specifically for the Russian Mennonites. The Wyandotte constitution of 1859 had provided for such exemptions as later legislatures might direct. In 1865 the Legislature had enacted a law providing that all those who had conscientious scruples against bearing arms might secure exemption from military service by appearing on the first day of each May before the county treasurer, to make an affidavit as to their scruples, and to pay the sum of thirty dollars to the public school fund. This was the law at the time of the migration. Undoubtedly it was for the purpose of meeting the wishes of the Russian Mennonite immigrants that Governor Osborne in his message to the Legislature on January 15, 1874, proposed an amendment to the existing law. Speaking of the desirability of securing Mennonite immigrants for Kansas the Governor said—

> "It is hoped that large accessions may be made of these worthy settlers, and it may properly be considered whether any class of people who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms should be compelled to pay an onerous tax to be relieved therefrom. It strikes me as incongruous that such religious convictions should be made taxable by our laws."

The tax referred to, of course, was the thirty dollar fine payable each May for the privilege of exemption, of which no doubt the Mennonite delagation of 1873 had asked to be relieved. In accordance with this recommendation of the Governor's, the Legislature on March 9 of the same year, repealed that section of the law which inflicted the special tax for non performance of militia duty. Otherwise the law remained the same.

Other western states, desirous of Mennonite settlers, followed the example of Kansas. An exemption law had been prepared by the Legislature of Nebraska in 1875, but the legislature adjourned before it could be passed; and since that body met only semi-annually, it was not until 1877 that Nebraska enacted legislation similar to that in Kansas except that the claimant for exemption at the time of his appearance before the county clerk was required to produce witnesses of his membership in a non-resistant religious organization. The Minnesota law, passed the same year, provided that affidavits needed renewal only every five years instead of annually as in the Kansas and Nebraska statutes. Dakota being still a territory at this time was not competent to pass on legislation of this sort.

Of course in case of Federal legislation, these peace time militia regulations passed by the states would not guarantee non-resistants against being drawn into the army; but that perhaps was not so evident then as now.

Canada and Her Promises

Such of the Russian immigrants as were not satisfied with these state regulations, but desired some sort of promise from the national government went to Canada instead of the United States, where the Dominion government in an Order in Council granted them all they asked for. In fact throughout this entire period, the Canadian Government was more considerate of conscientious scruples than was that of the United States. As early as 1808 Ontario passed a law exempting "Quakers, Mennonists and Tunkers" from militia service, upon an annual payment of twenty shillings in times of peace, and five pounds when the militia was called out for defense. Refusal to comply with this law was punishable with a maximum jail sentence of one month. In 1839, following the union of the Upper and Lower Provinces, the fine was raised to ten pounds instead of five, and later several

other minor changes were made, but in the main, its general purport remained the same. In 1868 after the formation of the present Dominion of Canada, an act was passed by the Dominion legislature exempting Quakers, Mennonite, Dunkards, and all members of other religious denominations opposed to war, from militia service under such conditions as the Governor-General might prescribe. This act of 1868 was the basis on which the Canadian government promised the Russian Mennonites, who settled in Manitoba in 1873, complete military exemption as a condition of their migration to that Province. The conscription act of 1917 exempted from combatant service all religious bodies opposed to war in principle. The clause in this act, which exempts only from combatant service, it will be observed, differs from the act of 1868 and the Order in Council of 1873 which exempt from all service—combatant as well as non-combatant.

When the conscription act of the World War was passed, upon being reminded by a committee of western Mennonites, of this early law and promises, the Canadian Government agreed to abide by the provisions made for the Russian settlers of 1873, and granted exemption to all the descendants, both baptized and unbaptized, of the orginial settlers. Whether this liberal provision would apply also to the older Mennonite settlements of Ontario who were not a party to the agreement of 1873, but were included in the act of 1868, at first seemed doubtful. A number of Ontario Mennonites were taken into the army, but refusing to serve, were courtmartialed and given a two years prison sentence, which was later changed to farm furloughs. The Government, however, finally decided to give all the Mennonites of Canada both east and west, the benefits of the Order in Council of 1873—namely complete and unconditional exemption.

The Conscientious Objector in the World War

Coming back to this side of the international boundary line once more, as suggested elsewhere, the con-

scription act passed by our Congress exempted on religious ground,

> "Members of any well organized religious sect or organization at present organized and existing whose creed or principles forbid its members to participate in war in any form and whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed or principles of said organization. But no person shall be exempted from service in any capacity that the President shall declare non-combatant."

This exemption clause, it will be observed, differs from most of its predecessors in that it exempts only from combatant, and not from such service as the President may declare to be non-combatant. The President was slow in defining non-combatant service. It was generally taken for granted by the war department that the hospital service, commissary, and other departments not directly engaged in the killing process came under that heading. But of the two thousand Mennonite young men who were drafted into the army perhaps half refused even non-combatant service, feeling that it was just as inconsistent to carry food and ammunition to those who did the killing as to bear arms themselves, or often to heal sick soldiers in order that they might again be returned to the trenches. These absolutists, or conscientious objectors as they were called, became quite a problem for the army officers. They were often roughly handled by petty officers, who had little sympathy for conscientious scruples and less for the law which recognized them. In all the camps the objectors were subjected to ridicule, and were considered fair game for any army officer or Y. M. C. A. secretary who cared to take a hand in breaking down their resistance. Even some of the higher officers, entirely out of sympathy with the liberal policy of the War department, often permitted unnecessary abuse of those who refused work of any sort

under the army rule, or to don the uniform. The worst abuses prevailed in Camp Funston in Kansas, where two officers, one a major and the other a captain, were finally removed for negligence in permitting rough treatment of the conscientious objectors. Some of these objectors had been brutally handled in the guard house; they had been bayonetted, beaten and tortured by various forms of the water cure, forced to stand at attention in a blazing sun outside of their barracks for hours at a time; held under cold showers until they fell to the ground hysterical.

These abuses were not perpetrated with the consent or knowledge of the higher officials of the war department. Those guilty were usually punished as soon as discovered. However, it was not until the spring of 1918 that a satisfactory policy of taking care of the conscientious objector was worked out by the War department.

According to this program the sincere objectors were to be segregated from others who might not be sincere. First of all a special Board of Inquiry was established to visit the various camps for the purpose of weeding out the spurious objectors from the sincere. Those sincere were to be sent to a detention camp at Ft. Leavenworth, from whence they were later to be furloughed to farm work. Court martial was provided for three classes—the insincere, those who were defiant, and such as were guilty of anti-war propaganda among their camp mates. The first class was to be sent back into the ranks, while the other two were to be sent to prison. This program was only partially carried out; the sincere objectors were not sent to Ft. Leavenworth, but furloughed to farms directly from their camps; such as were sent to Ft. Leavenworth went under prison sentence.

This Board examined about one thousand cases of conscientious objectors in the various camps, fully one-half of whom were Mennonites. In spite of the fact that Mennonite objectors undoubtedly were genuinely sincere, the Board sent about a hundred of them to Ft. Leaven-

worth as prisoners under a ten to twenty year sentence, usually on a fictitious charge of insubordination. Within a year after the close of the war all these were again given their liberty.

While the church officially stood united and firmly back of the nonresistant doctrine, the young men in the camps were not quite so unanimous. The following stray observations indicate that the great majority, however, were still true to the traditional Mennonite peace principles.

The Hutterites were the only group whose young men stood as a unit against service of any sort—that is they were all conscientious objectors. The Krimmer Brethren, with a membership of nearly one thousand, had fifty young men in camp. Twenty-eight of these were conscientious objectors; twenty took noncombatant service; two entered regular service, one of whom fell on the battlefield. The Central Illinois Conference, with a membership of twenty-six hundred, reported in August 1918, seventy-two men in service. Of these twenty-six had enlisted; twenty-seven were noncombatants; and five were classed as conscientious objectors. Of the Old Mennonites and Amish a large majority were conscientious objectors, though some of these accepted camp work. Among the Russians, both the General Conference and among the Bruedergemeinde perhaps three-fourths of those in Kansas and Oklahoma were of the conscientious objector class, while the rest were non-combatants. Barely a score among the western Russians took regular service. On the Pacific coast and in Minnesota there were a larger number of non-combatants, with fewer conscientious objectors. The Eastern District Conference generally accepted non-combatant service. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ were mostly conscientious objectors. The Swiss congregations in Ohio had few in the regular service, but also few objectors. Nearly all were non-combatants. The Swiss in Indiana had more conscientious objectors, sever-

al of whom were sentenced to Ft. Leavenworth. One small congregation in Iowa perhaps stood alone in having all its young men in the regular service.

Taking the denomination as a whole including all branches, it would appear that the non-combatants and the conscientious objectors were nearly equally divided, and that those taking regular service were a very small number.

What of the Future

In the light of the record just reviewed it seems quite evident that the American Mennonites thus far have kept the faith; and that the American governments have been quite considerate of those having a tender conscience on the matter of war. But what of the future? Will the American government continue its liberal policy of granting special privileges in future wars? Will the Mennonites themselves in the face of popular pressure have the courage to maintain their peace principles; or will they, like their European brethren, gradually succumb to the spirit of the age, and abandon entirely what for four centuries has continued to be a fundamental doctrine of the Mennonite faith, and today still in America its distinguishing characteristic, and perhaps the only excuse for the separate existence of the denomination?

Whatever the answer may be to these questions, one thing seems quite certain—the going will be much more difficult than in the past, both without and within the church. Not only will governments be less willing to make special concessions to privileged minorities, but there are forces at work within the church itself that tend to undermine both the desire and the will of many of the less seriously minded young men to follow a policy so unpopular, especially in times of stress and danger, as the refusal to march with the crowd. It is a well known fact, contradictory though it may seem, that democracy

is often much less tolerant of special privileges for the minority than autocracy. Arbitrary rulers, not subject to popular opinion, may easily grant exceptional concessions to the few in return for other considerations; but a democracy, resting upon popular consent, will hardly indulge the minority with unusual rights. Were the question of military exemption put to a popular vote today, either in times of peace or war, it undoubtedly would lose by a large majority. If in the next war there should be a universal conscription act, as there likely will be, any exemption clause will be contested much more bitterly than was the clause in the act of 1917.

A significant sign showing the trend of public opinion on this question is the attitude taken by our state controlled educational institutions. Before the recent war it would have been possible without much trouble for any freshman, coming from a nonresistant church, and having scruples against enrolling for military drill, to secure release from this exercise from almost any state university. Today that is no longer possible. Ohio State University some months ago expelled a number of students because they refused, on religious grounds, to take military drill.

The Supreme Court and Freedom of Conscience

While we still like to boast of America as the home of religious toleration where conscience reigns supreme, yet in constitutional theory at least, we are not far behind those totalitarian states that would make the state the supreme object of loyalty and worship—above the church, God, home, individual rights and conscience. The Supreme Court not long ago in one of its famous five to four decisions, declared that where individual conscience, religious or otherwise, came into conflict with the demands of the state, conscience must give way to the dictates of the state. According to this theory, which must be considered as the official attitude of the United States Government, since it rests upon the decision of the

highest tribunal of the land, the Pilgrim Fathers, whom we still admire because they had the courage to leave England for conscience sake, and established here the land of the free, if they were living among us today, and if they insisted on the same rights they demanded of England in 1620, they would all be in jail, as they were then, or exiled perhaps to some less democratic country like Mexico, or Paraguay, where the desire for industrious settlers is still strong enough to offer such settlers, as an inducement to colonize their unoccupied lands, special consideration such as complete religious toleration, including military exemption.

Neither is it any longer the policy of the Federal government to grant naturalization papers to an alien who will not take an oath to interpret the phrase "defend the constitution" as meaning "to take up arms in times of war." Mrs. Carl J. Landes, born in Switzerland, a Mennonite nurse, was denied citizenship several years ago at Lima, Ohio, by the Federal agent, because although she declared herself willing to defend the constitution by dying for her country if necessary as a nurse even in war, yet she could not conscientiously promise to take up arms. Professor Klassen of Bluffton College was denied citizenship on similar grounds by the same court. Somewhat later, however, both were granted naturalization in the same court by a more liberal minded judge over the protest of the Federal agent. There are not many judges as openminded and as courageous as this judge of Allen County, Ohio; and unless the Supreme Court reverses its present attitude it will remain extremely difficult, if not entirely impossible for any Mennonite alien to remain true to his Mennonite faith, and at the same time become an American citizen. He must choose which he will be. He can not serve two masters.

Dangers Threatening the Peace Doctrine

It is inevitable that these restrictions from without will tend to break down the resistance against militariza-

tion of the church from within. Young Mennonite students in state universities often do not see the relation between military training in times of peace and service in times of war. They may look upon the drill as a mere form of physical exercise. But no one taking military drill can find a valid or logical excuse for refusing military service. And usually when he is through with the first he no longer asks for the second. The surest antidote for non-resistance among our young students is military drill in our state controlled colleges.

Another disintegrating influence, not formerly in evidence, that is threatening the peace principles as well as many other of the distinctive doctrines and practices of the Mennonites, is the changing social and economic order. In the past the American Mennonites were almost exclusively a rural people, and lived in compact colonies, where, speaking a common and strange language—German or some corruption of it, worshipping in a country church which was the social as well as the religious center, sending their children to the little country school controlled by them, with little demand for higher education, their little community in the horse and buggy days remained a self sufficient economic and social unit as well as a religious organization. They concerned themselves little with the rest of the world, nor the world with them. It was easy thus to retain and perpetuate their distinctive beliefs and customs.

But all this is rapidly being changed now. With the coming of the automobile, rural telephone, compulsory high school attendance, increasing contacts with city life, college training, all these distinctive features of earlier Mennonitism are being ironed out, and in the ironing process unfortunately, together with many of the non-essentials, some of the fundamentals are in danger of being lost also.

Mixed marriages, too, which are increasing as Men-

nonites broaden their contacts with the outside world contribute their full share to this liquidating danger. Non-resistance and refusal to go to war seems a strange doctrine to one who does not have the background of four hundred years of teaching on this subject; and it is difficult for him to appreciate such an attitude in the face of an overwhelming popular opinion to the contrary. Children of such marriages usually follow the views of the non-Mennonite parent on this subject.

The greatest menace of all, perhaps, to the Mennonite peace doctrine is the subtle influence creeping into the church from certain short cut Bible schools which are committed to an unwholesome overemphasis on a militant millenarianism, which thrives best in an atmosphere saturated with the spirit of warfare and catastrophe. These schools do not believe in peace. They want war because it fits in best with their particular interpretation of things to come. Many of our ministers attend these Bible schools. They frequently come back lukewarm Mennonites, with a weakened loyalty to the distinctive and fundamental principles of Mennonitism. There is no surer nor quicker way to drive non-resistance out of the Mennonite church than by letting these Bible schools train our ministers and leaders.

What does all this mean? To me it means that Mennonites if they are concerned for the preservation of their faith need to awaken to these dangers and begin an active and organized campaign for checking these disintegrating influences.

Education for Peace

Our young people need to be educated in the ways of peace. I use the term education in its broadest sense, including the training in the home and church, as well as in the school, and all those influences which help to mould the ideas and ideals of growing youth. We can

make of the coming generation just what we want them to be if we utilize all the educational facilities at our disposal. Education whatever else it may be, is a moulding process. Russia is deliberately growing a generation of atheists; and is succeeding only too well. Italy has as its goal, a generation of soldiers, willing to die for the glory of the fatherland; Nazi Germany, a nation of pagan race worshippers. We can train our young people, in the ways of peace and save them for the nonresistant life if we attend seriously to their education in the home, from the pulpit, and especially in the colleges. It ought not to be necessary to suggest that peace ideals can be inculcated only in those colleges that believe in them, our own and those of similar faith. Many Mennonites do not seem to realize the important part the college must play in the preservation of the doctrines of the church. Few young men have the stamina to maintain their traditional faith in the face of four years of subversive college teaching.

Above all, the ministry, too, and church leaders must stand firmly and unreservedly back of the peace teaching of the church both by precept and example. Too often many of them by virtue of their training in seminaries not sympathetic to Mennonite principles have lost their interest in these distinctive principles. The greatest institutional need of the Mennonite church today is a seminary of her own, where her ministry is trained, or adoption of one of similar faith on this point; and then a ministry faithful to these fundamental teachings; a ministry as loyal to Mennonite colleges and schools as to the mission cause, the charitable work or any other institutions of the church. Unless the leadership of the church gets wholeheartedly back of its training schools, Mennonitism is doomed. To secure this support of the leadership unreservedly and wholeheartedly must undoubtedly be the first objective in any movement for the preservation of the faith of the fathers.